

WHAT IS NEW OR  
EVEN RELEVANT?  
NOTHING!

# T.R.P.

## News and Opinion

### Did the Mob Kill JFK?

By Harvey Z. Yazijian

"I thought I was helping the US government," claimed Santos Trafficante before the House Select Committee on Assassinations (HSCA). He had just been asked about his involvement in the Mafia/CIA plots to kill Fidel Castro, and, to listen to him, you'd think this fragile old man was just another patriotic Joe doing his duty. Yet his grandfatherly appearance didn't deceive anyone, for Trafficante is the organized crime boss of southern Florida and a key conspirator in a network of mobsters that worked with the CIA to assassinate Castro. More important, HSCA has confirmed that this network had direct ties to both Lee Harvey Oswald, the alleged assassin of John Kennedy, and his assailant, Jack Ruby.

The startling revelations of organized crime's shadowy connections to Dealey Plaza in 1963 came in the last week of HSCA's month-long public hearings into the Kennedy assassination. The carefully orchestrated hearings, conducted in September, displayed a galaxy of politicians, technocrats, feds, cops, spooks, and kooks; fifty-seven witnesses testified and more than 500 exhibits were displayed.

HSCA will not parrot the Warren Commission's lone-assassin conclusions in its final report due in early 1979. HSCA's most significant finding may be that Jack Ruby

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Santos Trafficante

was up to his fedora in suspicious underworld connections that link directly to Lee Harvey Oswald, and it will recommend that the Justice Department further examine this Mob/Dealy Plaza matrix for a possible conspiracy. HSCA is also expected to cautiously claim that Lee Harvey Oswald seems to have shot the president by himself, although it may concede other alternatives can't be excluded. Said HSCA's chief counsel Robert Blakey: "The question of organized crime involvement is still an open one. Nothing that has been uncovered excludes it."

Critics of the lone-assassin theory were disappointed with much of the hearings, citing examples such as the questionable analysis of the medical evidence upon which HSCA constructed much of its case for a  
(Continued on page 8)

single gunman, and the lack of any proof that Oswald was actually the assassin. However, HSCA's treatment of the Mob connection was more impressive.

The hearings confirmed through telephone records and other sources that Jack Ruby had extensive contact with close associates of important Mob leaders such as Trafficante, Sam Giancana, Mob leader of Chicago, Ruby's hometown, and Carlos Marcello, Mob chieftain of New Orleans, where Oswald spent the summer prior to the assassination. Furthermore, many of Ruby's contacts have been publicly identified as trusted associates of former Teamster president Jimmy Hoffa, according to a recent book, *The Hoffa Wars*, by Dan Moldea (Paddington Press). Moldea, aided by a staffer from HSCA, found that Hoffa was associated with the aforementioned gangsters, and had financed many of their operations with Teamster loans.

The circle closed when HSCA confirmed that within this syndicate was an operator named David Ferrie who knew Oswald. Ferrie, a bizarre but brilliant soldier of fortune, was Carlos Marcello's chief investigator and pilot. It was the discovery of the Ferrie/Oswald relationship that prompted New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison to initiate an investigation in 1966 into a possible plot. (Unfortunately, four days after word of Garrison's probe was leaked to the press, chief suspect Ferrie was found dead in his New Orleans apartment. The case was never solved.) Thus, Oswald, through Ferrie, Marcello, and Hoffa, can be linked directly to Ruby. (HSCA reported one incident where the chain was even shorter. On the evening before the assassination, Ruby had drinks with a woman who Ferrie had contacted two months earlier.)

Furthermore, Hoffa and these mobsters, according to Moldea, the hearings, and other sources, shared a bitter hatred of the

Kennedys because of the brothers' war against organized crime. The first assault came when JFK was a promising young senator on the McClellan Committee and brother Robert was its aggressive chief counsel. In a series of celebrated hearings, the McClellan Committee exposed the scandalous dealings between the Teamsters and the underworld. When JFK won the presidential election in 1960, the Mob's worst fears were realized. Bobby Kennedy was appointed attorney general and he promptly mobilized the Justice Department for a full-scale attack in which Giancana, Marcello and Hoffa were targeted. (HSCA's Blakey was a young Justice Department attorney at the time.) RFK's widely reported "Get Hoffa" squad began harassing the Teamster boss who, according to a former Teamster official, was so outraged by the summer of 1962 he began devising schemes to assassinate Bobby Kennedy. At the same time,

Marcello was actually whisked off the streets of New Orleans by Justice Department agents, thrown on a plane, and brusquely deported to Guatemala. The feisty gangster snuck back into the country (in a plane flown by David Ferrie) and, according to one Mob expert, vowed revenge. HSCA heard testimony that, also at this time, Trafficante had told a Cuban exile: "Have you seen how his brother [RFK] is hitting Hoffa...? He doesn't know that this kind of encounter is very delicate. Mark my words, this man Kennedy is in trouble, and he will get what is coming to him." When the Cuban asserted that JFK would probably be reelected in 1964, Trafficante grimly responded, "No, José, he is going to be hit."

Whether these men had their revenge has yet to be proven, yet the murder of JFK did stop the only concerted federal effort in recent times to destroy the underworld. Organized crime expert Ralph Salerno, a witness before HSCA, said, "The bullet that killed John Kennedy killed Bobby Kennedy's dream to destroy the organized crime society." Or, as Jimmy Hoffa succinctly told a reporter shortly after the assassination, "Bobby Kennedy is just another lawyer now."

Not only were Oswald and Ruby closely connected by a syndicate of powerful mobsters who were directly threatened by the Kennedy administration, this very syndicate was already involved in one assassination conspiracy. Giancana, Trafficante and associates had been enlisted by the CIA to kill Castro. Even Jimmy Hoffa, reports Moldea, has been implicated by a government informant as a liaison between the CIA and mobsters. The Mob cooperated because it sought a new regime in Cuba that would tolerate gambling and the other rackets it enjoyed before Castro kicked the

mobsters out. An important unanswered question here is: how could one branch of the government work so feverishly to imprison or deport Hoffa and these gangsters while another branch recruited them for murder, the most sensitive of foreign policy activities (President Johnson would later describe these plots as a "damned Murder, Inc.")?

— Another group with parallel interests were the anti-Castro Cubans. Blakey admitted that their possible involvement in the assassination, like the Mob's, couldn't be "readily dismissed." As Blakey explained, many Cubans fled Cuba after Castro took power in 1959 and lived in exile within the United States, particularly in Miami. Their hostility toward Castro soon led to the creation of a plethora of groups, as many as a hundred at a time, all working in one fashion or another to overthrow Castro. The CIA funded, trained, equipped, and directed many of these groups as either political fronts or foot soldiers for raids on the Cuban coast. However, after being supported by the US government for several years, the exiles felt bitterly betrayed by JFK when he

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"I'll see your cap on taxes and raise you by a \$138 million welfare cut."

forbade all raids after the Missile Crisis. These Cubans, Blakey noted, certainly had a motive to kill Kennedy.

They also had some of the connections. During the summer and fall of 1963, Oswald took an interest in Cuban politics, particularly while in New Orleans. Although the Warren Commission portrayed Oswald as a pro-Castroite, HSCA reported that virtually all of his political contacts were with anti-Castro Cubans. Furthermore, two credible incidents were presented that strongly suggest Oswald was actually working with anti-Castro forces. One came from the leader of a particularly militant group who claimed he saw Oswald with an American named "Morris Bishop," who surreptitiously directed his group's activities. Two other witnesses, Sylvia and Anna Odio, saw Oswald in the company of two anti-Castro Cubans in Dallas two months prior to the assassination. Blakey implied that the Warren Commission glossed over the latter report because it was inconsistent with the commission's overall findings.

Furthermore, Jack Ruby allegedly had

dealings with the Cubans. According to a 1959 CIA report, Ruby apparently visited Trafficante in Havana (this report was concealed from the Warren Commission and released thirteen years later). Thus, a third alternative postulated by some observers at the hearings was that components of the underworld and the Cuban exile community could have banded together to kill Kennedy.

Consequently, what government investigators must contend with is the possibility of an unholy alliance of renegade CIA agents, gangsters, besieged Teamsters, and fanatic Cubans, which, when threatened by Kennedy's domestic and foreign policies, struck back. However, the case against this group as a whole or in part is still highly circumstantial.

Despite its many shortcomings, HSCA is a start. Although it won't produce any crystallized conclusions, the accusatory finger it will point at the mobsters, and perhaps Hoffa, should be enough to show that the Kennedy assassination is still unresolved. ■